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SUBJECT: MFA BRIEFS AMBASSADORS ON FORUM ARRANGEMENTS

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Summary

11. (SBU) The Ministry of Foreign Affairs October 31 held a meeting with ambassadors from countries expected to attend the November 11-12 Forum for the Future conference in Manama and presented them with copies of the agendas for the November 11 Senior Officials meeting and November 12 Ministers meeting. They also distributed copies of the draft Bahrain Declaration. MFA Assistant Under Secretary Shaikh Abdul Aziz said he expected 32 or 33 foreign ministers and several other ministers and deputy ministers to participate in the conference. He said the strongest message to emerge from the Forum should be that civil society representatives are fully engaged as equals with governments on the issue of reform. He noted there will be one GOB-sanctioned "parallel" forum organized by NGOs to deal with regional reform issues other than those covered at the official Forum. He proposed distributing the findings of the parallel meeting to the ministers. End Summary.

12. (SBU) MFA Assistant Under Secretary for Coordination and Follow-Up, and lead Forum for the Future (FfF) coordinator, Shaikh Abdul Aziz bin Mubarak Al Khalifa October 31 chaired a meeting on Forum arrangements for ambassadors of all countries invited to and planning to participate in the conference. Some 35 ambassadors and other senior diplomats attended (including the Syrian ambassador to Bahrain). The MFA distributed updated versions of the agendas for the November 11 Senior Officials meeting and the November 12 Ministers meeting. (Note: Embassy faxed the agendas to NEA/ARPI and NEA/PI.)

Over Thirty Ministers to Attend

13. (SBU) Shaikh Abdul Aziz said he expected 32 or 33 foreign ministers to attend the Forum as heads of delegation and one or two deputy FMs. The French Education minister will lead his delegation. Several other ministers are expected to attend as members of their national delegations. He requested that ambassadors query their ministers about their preferences for making an intervention during the meeting on November 12. He noted that the Bahraini Embassy in London had previously forwarded this request to relevant embassies in London. He explained that only the foreign ministers from the United States, Bahrain, UK, Jordan, and Morocco would participate in the closing press conference. All heads of delegation plus two others would be invited to attend an opening dinner the evening of November 11, and there would be a group photo for attending ministers before the conference opens the morning of November 12.

Civil Society As Equal Partner

14. (SBU) Shaikh Abdul Aziz said that the strongest message to emerge from the Forum should be that civil society representatives are fully engaged with governments on the issue of reform. For the first time, NGOs are sitting at the table as equals to government ministers. Governments need to hear from the NGOs about their priorities for reform and how these reforms should be implemented. He noted there will be a Parallel Forum for the Future conference November 7-8, organized by Bahraini human rights activist Abdul Nabi Al Ekry. This conference conforms to the idea of the FfF - that is, regional reform issues - but does not duplicate Forum topics. Bahraini and UK government representatives intend to receive the findings of the parallel conference on the 11th and distribute them to ministers on the 12th.

15. (SBU) Shaikh Abdul Aziz stated that there likely will be other competing meetings taking place at the time of the

Forum, but the Bahraini government does not sanction these. Many will deal with internal politics in Bahrain and other countries in the area, which does not conform to the regional focus of the Forum. He warned that representatives of these conferences will likely try to gain access to G-8 ministers during their stay in Manama.

16. (SBU) The agenda for the November 11 Senior Officials meeting (distributed November 1 to G-8 ambassadors) calls for a full day session, chaired by Shaikh Abdul Aziz. He asked ambassadors to identify their heads of delegation for the meeting and the officials' preferred points for intervention.

Finalizing Texts

17. (SBU) Shaikh Abdul Aziz noted that the draft text of the Bahrain Declaration had been distributed to capitals about ten days earlier. The deadline for providing input was November 7. He said select Forum participants were working on the text of the Chairman's Summary and the charter for the Foundation for the Future.

18. (SBU) He explained that the GOB was arranging four 90-minute roundtable sessions dealing with various Forum issues to be covered by the press on November 11. The sessions will feature senior officials from governments wishing to participate. The GOB had not yet specified the topics for the roundtables, but asked for input from the ambassadors on who from their delegations would like to participate.

MONROE